

Interview with the Shapeshifter

My name is Norman Gates. I'm a tall thin writer with an unkempt mop of dark hair. I've worked as a music journalist for a couple of years now and I'm pretty sick and tired of it. Each assignment I find that I'm being told what sort of thing to write and I'm instructed to use words which build up the image of some shallow pop star, words which add edgy scandal to the blandest of singers or words which imply that the sex and drugs are part of an exciting world of genius music creation when, in reality, everything in this commercial music world is fakery and the enslavement of talent.

The promoters sign up some lackluster kid with a pretty face and the producers use their studio magic to make that kid sound like god's gift to banal repetition of the tragic break-up song.

Whenever the corporate record industry happens to get hold of an artist who has any true genius talent the managers and promoters destroy that mind with drugs and hypnosis and overwork.

Ever since the earliest days of the recording industry the punishing schedule of live gigs, touring the world, cutting another album, doing television appearances and so on has been propped up by nasty little drug dealers with a pocket full of artificial motivation. When I became a music journalist I thought I was entering an exciting world of genuine talent and now I feel that they've made me into just another cog in the corporate machine, part of the monster making industry which eats people up and spits them out. I began to feel haunted by my surname "Gates". What was I becoming? The gatekeeper of the music industry? Sitting at the gates of the city wall deciding who to let enter or leave or be commemorated in stone? We built this city on rock and roll and Norman Gates will decide whether you are part of the structure?

I hate being part of the lies and the sick joke which fills the heads of the masses with processed banality and regurgitated archetypes. However, recently something happened which changed absolutely everything about this stinking shoddy job.

I was told to go and interview Michael Kristen, the legendary voice of Annwn. A towering genius of the 1970s rock world Michael Kristen with his band Annwn is credited as the innovator who changed the course of music history multiple times. I felt honoured to have the opportunity to interview him.

I practiced my pronunciation of Annwn. It is supposed to be pronounced "Annoonn" though noobies always say it as "An-win". I made a note to ask Michael about the origins of the word and the reasons he chose it as the name for the band. I went to meet him at his house in Faygate, a village in the South East of England.

The house in which Kristen lives is classic creepy. Dark and brooding gothic architecture in its own private grounds. When I spoke into the intercom at the front entrance the gate swung creakingly open just like the one in the 1960s Addams Family TV series and, also like that one, slammed shut behind me with multiple clangs and lockings. I commented on this when Michael welcomed me into the house and he chuckled amiably and theatrically announced "Welcome to the House of Dreams and Nightmares!"

He told me that the name wasn't his idea. He said that the house had been called that already, since long before he took ownership. I sort of believed him. We went into his study and he made a pot of tea. He did it himself too, I noticed. No servants. No Lurch.

He was continually pointing to objects and pictures and various memorabilia of the rock music world and talking about the history of rock and role-playing as archaeology, anthropology and image adjustment.

We sat down and I expressed surprise that he had asked to be interviewed after many years of being sought after by journalists the world over. "I've taken an interest in your career Norman" said Michael flippin' Kristen the world famous star!

He, the genius of a thousand faces and characters in songs he had written and performed and recorded on numerous platinum selling albums, had taken an interest in my career!!! He grinned at my expression of stunned shock. "You've taken an interest.....?????" I stammered.

Chuckling, he nodded and said "I know about the way your parents treated you and how you escaped". "How do you know ... ah mmm? What?" I couldn't believe it. I read a story you wrote called "The Boy Who Escaped" and I realised it was based on something true, so I did some digging into your history". He poured the tea.

I said "Oh *that* story. It's only a bit of juvenilia". "It's more than that," he said. I squirmed. "Ye...Yes, it sort of is more than that but it was a fantasy version of umm ... of what my parents did to me". He nodded, "They treated you like a science experiment and you escaped into books and became a wizard".

"Not really," I said. He waited for me to continue and I was aware that the roles had reversed and that he was now interviewing me. "I became a writer, not a wizard" I said, lamely.

"Hair splitting," he replied.

For a moment his eyes rolled as though he was having a petit mal fit and he muttered "Experience is stored in the libraries of the galactic city". Then he straightened up, sitting to attention, turned to his left, picked up a notepad and pen and wrote something down. Turning to me he said "Sorry about that. Sometimes I get messages about possible song lyrics".

I wasn't sure if he was just putting on one of his acts but it felt like it was real. "Come with me" said Kristen, "I want to show you something".

I followed him out of the room and through the hallway. It was different. The hallway was different than it had been when we came through it the first time. Things had moved. The furniture was different and the walls were configured differently. What the hell was going on?

Michael Kristen led me through a round purple room and into an oblong green room. There was a large aquarium tank full of water but no fish.

I was feeling an almost overwhelming sense of the uncanny. I said this to Michael and he gave me a really intense look directly eye-to-eye. He spoke in a very serious tone. "Freud explains that the feeling of the uncanny is a psychological manifestation of a sense of not having an accurate self image. A person who doesn't entirely know their self may project that feeling as a sense of wrongness in their surroundings. Commonplace objects may appear as strange or uncanny or weird".

He waved his arms to indicate our surroundings in that house which he called "The House of Dreams and Nightmares".

"However," he continued, "in this case your feelings are correct. This house and this situation we are in is indeed truly uncanny!" Michael Kristen was the ultimate showman and I was getting a one-to-one close up performance.

"Now watch this," said Michael. He took off his chocolate coloured shirt. I watched, wondering what was coming.

He took off his black tennis shoes. He was standing there in just his red jeans in the dimmed light of that oblong green room with the fishless aquarium.

He took off his jeans.

He was standing there in black boxer shorts. I was entranced, weirded out and excited at the same time.

He took off his boxer shorts.

Naked, he stepped up onto three small steps mounting to the edge of the aquarium tank. He climbed into the tank and lay down with his face just above the level of the water. He submerged his face and lay there, completely covered by the water. Bubbles arose from his mouth and nose. I began to panic. Had he brought me here only to watch him commit suicide?

I didn't know what to do. I was paralysed by shock. I stared at his body in the water. Then he moved. In a very strange way. His flesh rippled. His body flowed. He was changing shape.

As I watched, transfixed, his body changed from that of a very handsome and healthy looking man into the shape of an enormous tadpole, polliwog or larval stage of some human sized amphibian. His head retained vestigial human features and he turned his face to look at me..... and then he winked.

I passed out.